

119TH CONGRESS  
2D SESSION

**S.** \_\_\_\_\_

To direct the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to maintain  
the Cooperative Institute program.

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IN THE SENATE OF THE UNITED STATES

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Ms. CANTWELL (for herself and Mr. WICKER) introduced the following bill;  
which was read twice and referred to the Committee on

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**A BILL**

To direct the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administra-  
tion to maintain the Cooperative Institute program.

1       *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*  
2       *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3       **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4       This Act may be cited as the “Cooperative Institute  
5       Act of 2026”.

6       **SEC. 2. COOPERATIVE INSTITUTES.**

7       (a) DEFINITIONS.—In this section:

8               (1) ADMINISTRATION.—The term “Administra-  
9       tion” means National Oceanic and Atmospheric Ad-  
10       ministration.

1           (2) APPROPRIATE CONGRESSIONAL COMMIT-  
2       TEES.—The term “appropriate congressional com-  
3       mittees” means the Committee on Commerce,  
4       Science, and Transportation of the Senate and the  
5       Committees on Natural Resources and Science,  
6       Space, and Technology of the House of Representa-  
7       tives.

8           (3) COOPERATIVE INSTITUTE.—The term “Co-  
9       operative Institute” means—

10           (A) an academic or research partnership  
11       between—

12           (i) the National Oceanic and Atmos-  
13       pheric Administration; and

14           (ii) an eligible research institution, or  
15       an association or alliance of 2 or more eli-  
16       gible research institutions; and

17           (B) that was or is formed either through  
18       cooperative agreements previously established  
19       under the authority of section 406 of the Na-  
20       tional Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration  
21       Authorization Act of 1992 (15 U.S.C. 1540) or  
22       under the authority of this section.

23           (4) ELIGIBLE RESEARCH INSTITUTION.—The  
24       term “eligible research institution” means a research  
25       institution that—

1 (A) is a non-Federal academic or nonprofit  
2 institution;

3 (B) has an established research program in  
4 one or more areas relevant to the Administra-  
5 tion's mission;

6 (C) promotes the involvement of students  
7 and postdoctoral scientists in research and edu-  
8 cation; and

9 (D) cooperates with other research insti-  
10 tutes included in Cooperative Institutes.

11 (5) UNDER SECRETARY.—The term “Under  
12 Secretary” means the Under Secretary of Commerce  
13 for Oceans and Atmosphere.

14 (b) IN GENERAL.—

15 (1) PROGRAM GOALS.—The Under Secretary  
16 shall maintain within the Administration a Coopera-  
17 tive Institute program, which shall promote basic  
18 and applied research, education, training, and out-  
19 reach that aligns with the Administration's mission,  
20 fund research capabilities that do not exist within  
21 the Administration, and expand research capacity in  
22 sciences that are related to the work of the Adminis-  
23 tration.

1           (2) COOPERATIVE INSTITUTE ACTIVITIES.—To  
2       achieve these goals, the Cooperative Institutes  
3       shall—

4           (A) conduct collaborative, long-term re-  
5       search relevant to the Administration’s mission,  
6       with substantial involvement between Adminis-  
7       tration scientists and those at eligible research  
8       institutions in one or more scientific disciplines  
9       of interest to the Administration;

10          (B) leverage scientific, educational, and  
11       outreach expertise at eligible research institu-  
12       tions which, depending on the research needs  
13       determined by the Administration, may or may  
14       not be located near an Administration facility;

15          (C) support the participation of under-  
16       graduate and graduate students and  
17       postdoctoral scientists in Administration-related  
18       research studies; and

19          (D) strengthen or expand research capac-  
20       ity within the research institutions in Adminis-  
21       tration-related research by providing funding to  
22       support administrative and scientific research  
23       activities.

24       (3) EMERGING RESEARCH.—Every 2 years, the  
25       Under Secretary shall conduct an assessment of the

1        need for additional Cooperative Institutes to address  
2        emerging research needs that align with the program  
3        goals described in paragraph (1).

4        (c) ESTABLISHMENT OF COOPERATIVE INSTI-  
5 TUTES.—

6            (1) IN GENERAL.—The Under Secretary may  
7        establish a Cooperative Institute by entering into a  
8        cooperative agreement with an eligible research insti-  
9        tution, or an association or alliance of 2 or more eli-  
10       gible research institutions.

11           (2) COMPETITION AND REVIEW.—

12            (A) IN GENERAL.—Subject to subpara-  
13        graph (B), the Under Secretary shall use an  
14        open competition and merit-based peer-review  
15        process for selecting eligible research institu-  
16        tions for each new Cooperative Institute, except  
17        as specified in subparagraph.

18            (B) RESTRICTED POOL.—The Under Sec-  
19        retary may use a limited competition when the  
20        Administration determines that it is in the best  
21        interest of the Federal Government to restrict  
22        the pool of qualified eligible research institution  
23        applicants. The Under Secretary shall justify  
24        the rationale for such a restriction under the

1 Department of Commerce and Administration  
2 policies related to Federal assistance.

3 (3) CONSOLIDATION.—In cases where multiple  
4 eligible research institutions join to form a Coopera-  
5 tive Institute, the Administration shall encourage  
6 these eligible research institutions to consolidate  
7 management, administrative, and oversight activities  
8 into one lead Cooperative Institute, provided the  
9 benefit of consolidation outweighs the costs.

10 (4) COLLABORATION.—

11 (A) IN GENERAL.—To foster collabora-  
12 tions, the Administration is authorized to collo-  
13 cate Federal employees and staff from eligible  
14 research institutions of Cooperative Institutes.  
15 These collocations may involve—

16 (i) Cooperative Institute staff hosted  
17 at Federal facilities; and

18 (ii) Federal staff assigned their duty  
19 station at the eligible research institutions.

20 (B) CHOICE OF ARRANGEMENT.—The Ad-  
21 ministration may choose the arrangement de-  
22 scribed in this paragraph that best fits the  
23 needs of the Cooperative Institute when the  
24 benefits outweigh the costs.

25 (d) FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE.—

1           (1) IN GENERAL.—The cooperative agreements  
2       described in subsection (c)(1) shall be carried out in  
3       accordance with section 6305 of title 31, United  
4       States Code, and may be facilitated by a 5-year Fed-  
5       eral financial assistance award.

6           (2) SECOND AWARD.—The Under Secretary  
7       may award a second 5-year Federal financial assist-  
8       ance award after a Cooperative Institute renewal re-  
9       view, which shall—

10           (A) be based on the outcome of an exter-  
11       nally led peer review process that occurs at or  
12       about the beginning of the fourth year of the  
13       initial award;

14           (B) be conducted with the help and sup-  
15       port of the Science Advisory Board of the Ad-  
16       ministration;

17           (C) include a measurement of Cooperative  
18       Institute performance relative to well-estab-  
19       lished, mutually agreed-upon performance  
20       measures defined by the Administration and the  
21       research institutions; and

22           (D) determine a potential renewal period  
23       of not more than 5 additional years and the  
24       level of funding commensurate with the final re-  
25       view rating.

1           (e) DISCONTINUANCE.—The Under Secretary may  
2 terminate or decide not to renew an established Coopera-  
3 tive Institute if the following is submitted to the appro-  
4 priate congressional committees not less than 60 days  
5 prior to termination or expiration of the Cooperative Insti-  
6 tute cooperative agreement:

7           (1) A timeline for the planned termination or  
8 expiration of the Cooperative Institute.

9           (2) A detailed written report, including—

10               (A) the justification for termination or ex-  
11 piration of the Cooperative Institute;

12               (B) any failures of the Cooperative Insti-  
13 tute to meet its stated objectives, including poor  
14 management, poor research quality, or poor fis-  
15 cal management;

16               (C) measurements of the Cooperative Insti-  
17 tute performance relative to the mutually  
18 agreed-upon performance measures defined by  
19 the Administration and the eligible research in-  
20 stitutions;

21               (D) plans for reassignment of Administra-  
22 tion staff assigned to the Cooperative Institute;  
23 and

24               (E) an explanation of how the research  
25 needs that are being met by the Cooperative In-

1           stitute will be fulfilled by other entities within  
2           the Administration, or an explanation of why  
3           the research needs no longer exist.

4       (f) HANDBOOK.—The Under Secretary shall main-  
5   tain a Cooperative Institute Handbook that outlines how  
6   the Administration will manage the Cooperative Institutes.  
7   The Under Secretary shall consult the Directors of Coop-  
8   erative Institutes when updating the Cooperative Institute  
9   Handbook.

10       (g) MAINTENANCE OF COOPERATIVE INSTITUTES.—  
11   The Under Secretary shall maintain the Cooperative Insti-  
12   tutes, or their successor bodies, in existence as of the date  
13   of enactment of this Act, unless terminated as specified  
14   in subsection (e).